

Structured Cobol for Technical Students, by Dwight Watt, Prentice-Hall, 1998, 406 pages.

This is the first and only COBOL text that I have been pleased with in my 15-year involvement with the language. All other texts I have seen have concentrated on large, obtuse report programs with page after page of header definitions. Boring to the student to read, understand and possibly type in for modification.

This book is a good introductory-level text. Chapters include: Intro, Program Design, I-O Operations, Printed Reports, Arithmetic, Comparisons, Control Breaks, Tables, Sequential Files and Data Editing, Sorting, Sequential File Updates, Indexed Sequential Files and Indexed Sequential File Updates.

If two items had been different, then I would consider this the perfect COBOL text. The first is the lack of a 'HELLO, WORLD' program, I am a big fan of the minimalist approach and believe that every language should be introduced with the smallest program possible.

My second fuss is the lack of a chapter on numerical/scientific applications. I believe that most programmers (novice and experienced) would benefit from examples that show that COBOL is not just a business language and can do the types of algorithms for which other languages are more famous.

Included throughout the text are flowcharts (suitably introduced for the beginner), chapter summaries, review questions and programming assignments. The AS400 is used as the implementation environment and the appendices are used to describe it: Appendix A is the editor, and Appendix D is the Statement Formats for ILE COBOL/400.

In total, I enjoyed this text and will use it in any future COBOL courses that I teach.

Reviewed by Ronald Finkbine, Ph.D.